

Larvik Workshop

On September 14, 2023, the Ecologies of Stone research network group met in Larvik, Southern Norway, hosted by Lundhs A/S. The aim of the two-day workshop was to further discuss the dilemmas and potentials of modern extraction and use of building stones in relation to the quarry landscape. The research group members stem from a variety of fields, including geology, anthropology, landscape architecture, building architecture and engineering. The group was invited to visit the local quarries of Lundhs, where large amounts of larvikite are being extracted. The massive quarry spaces provided a common ground for registrations and interdisciplinary discussions focusing on the quarry as an ecological landscape.

Day 1:

The morning began with a drive to several of the larvikite quarries of Lundhs. The group members were able to gain an understanding of scale of the quarries and the qualities of the product extracted from them. The quarry workers, geologists and administrative personnel at Lundhs provided an overview of the processes of excavation, production and commercialization of larvikite. The morning site visits were followed by short presentations given by research group members. The presentations were designed to give an overview of the variety of resources represented at the workshop, that could be used in potential interdisciplinary research projects within the network.

Day 2:

The second day offered room for more in-depth discussions on some of the topics presented on the first day. The day began in a disused “frozen” quarry of Lundhs, where the research group members, from the point of view of each person’s specific expertise or discipline, gathered found artefacts, samples and photographs taken on the site. This “evidence” should point at potentials, curiosities and problems found in the quarry, that not necessarily would be obvious to others. The frozen quarry thus, became a field laboratory and a common ground for critical ecological thinking.

The evidence was discussed between group members and presented in short form during the afternoon. The presentations demonstrated the large variety of perspectives from which one can view the quarry space. Through analysing the evidence, a number of hierarchies of scale, structures and ecologies became apparent. The groups detected several artificially provoked geological layers and structures in the quarry. Typologies of tools and objects could be identified and linked to certain layers or parts of the quarry. Likewise, a wide variety of plant life could be observed – some were growing through the gaps between large boulders, in one vertical layer of the quarry, while other plants thrived among the smaller stones at the bottom of the quarry. Hammering on the walls of the quarry might make very distinct sounds in different areas, revealing acoustical properties. Traces of animals, microbiology and levels of radiation clearly differed from the specific locations within in the quarry where they were found. Finally, the appearance of these many layers, substructures and variations provided room for new ways of looking architecturally at the quarry. Should the quarry provide a place for concerts, baths or sports facilities, or should it rather be left alone, as a place for feral recovery. From the many potentials of future use emerged the awareness and responsibility of how to intervene in the quarry. Parts of the quarry seemed much more resistant to human intervention than others. The traces of previous intervention showed that whatever is done with these vast spaces, resuming extractions, keeping it frozen, filling it up or finding a new use, will have long, significant impacts for the ecology of the place.